how could anyone not want you?

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how could anyone not want you?

by polifandom

Summary

"It seems Gale has truly fucking *lucked out*. Not only are the Egans a family that accepts him, but they also want him to be happy – or, even yet, want him *around*.

Meanwhile, Gale had spent the entire night thinking about how he'd like it if their youngest son had railed him in a back alley.

God, he's rotten."

The one where Gale gets adopted by the Egan family. (part 1)

Notes

hello! so, this story will go into depth about adoptive sibling incest, and if you're not comfortable with that, i suggest you skip this one :)
i feel it's also worth noting that gale is 16 and john is 18.
this is part 1 of what i intend to become a much larger series! i did not tag underage because this part does not include smut, but that cannot be said about the ones that will follow.

that said, enjoy! <3

See the end of the work for more notes

The house isn't necessarily big, but the way it looks lived in makes the wall stretch for miles and miles upon Gale's eyes. The backyard has flowers and trees and cut grass, and there's a second floor and a basement and even a grill. Linda says they're not rich, and maybe they're not – but considering where Gale is from, they might as well be royalty.

He's barely stepped a foot into the house before he gets the first ugly, nasty thought that he doesn't belong there – but it's not his voice, it never is. Nonetheless, his father's words still bang around his skull, echoing against the empty walls of his stomach until he almost feels sick.

He has to continuously remind himself that his father is not there, that this is not *the house* . That one was grey and falling apart and had bushes up to his knees and no pictures on the walls.

Linda walks beside him completely oblivious to Gale's heart beating rapidly inside his chest. When she places a hand on his back, it grounds him to the present almost enough to ignore his father's voice in his mind.

"I know it's nothing fancy, but I promise you'll fit right in, sweetie. Okay?" Linda says.

She's looking at him like she expects him to say something, so he does; "It's perfect, Ma'am. Thank you."

"Oh, please, call me Lin. You don't need to be so formal!" She playfully nudges him, her brown hair swinging at her shoulders, and Gale notices he doesn't have to force the smile onto his face.

“Well, then thank you, *Lin* ,” Gale says, always eager to please, and the smile she gives back shows that she appreciates it.

“My husband will be home shortly from his baseball game. He’s so excited to see you again, said he can’t wait to get another talented young boy on his team!”

“Oh, I don’t know about all that, Ma’am-”

“Please Gale, call me Lin. Or even better, call me Mama. *You’re home* ,” Linda says, and something hot boils up in Gale’s stomach.

That is probably – no, *definitely* – the first time he’s ever, ever heard those words.

She guides him upstairs while Gale’s mind is still in a haze, talking his ears off about how excited her kids are to meet him and how happy she is to have him there.

He can barely process a single phrase.

Later, when he is in his room alone – *and what a wild concept that is* – he can barely get himself underneath the covers before his body completely gives out. He can’t remember the last time he slept on a proper mattress.

He dreams of nothing.

When he wakes up, it couldn’t have been longer than a couple hours

later.

His mind is still in a haze when he turns to face a girl standing at the foot of his bed. She's already at it by the time he opens his eyes; "Oh my god, so *you* are our new baby brother? Tammy is going to *freak out* ."

Gale blinks hard to force his eyes open, sitting up on the bed, "Hello?"

"Shit, sorry. Hi. I shouldn't have woken you up like that. Please don't tell Ma. I'm Melissa, the middle child- well, I guess now second oldest. Can I sit here?" She points to the corner of the bed, barely waiting for Gale's nod to do so. "Ma didn't bring us to the appointments because the orphanage would only let her and Da go. I really couldn't wait to meet you!"

Gale has to take a couple breaths before he tries to speak. "Uhm, that's really nice of you, but you didn't have to-"

"Don't be silly," she interrupts, "We Egans never pass up a chance to go see our folk. You'll catch on soon."

"I don't know, Melissa-"

She rolls her eyes, so playfully it seems effortless. "Please, only Ma calls me that when she's giving me a speech. You can call me Mel-"

"No one calls you that, *Lisa,* " a voice calls out from the door.

He's tall and brunette and with shoulders so wide, Gale wonders if this is another one of his *dreams* . He must be an Egan too – he faintly remembers Linda mentioning a younger son – with the way he and Melissa look like the perfect picture of each other.

And he's also shirtless. *Oh god.*

"Shut up, John. I can call myself whatever I want," Melissa says to him, and Gale realizes he hasn't blinked.

The boy walks further inside, dropping onto the bed across from Gale, "Whatever you say, Lisa."

Mel – well, Lisa? – turns to him again, "Ignore him. He's always in a mood when his team loses a game. I'll see you down for dinner soon? I'll help Ma set the table up."

Gale looks between them, forcing a smile, "Of course. See you downstairs."

The silence stretches in the room for all of two seconds before the boy is sitting down to face him, his hair wet with what looks like sweat and sticking every which way. "So you're Gale?"

Gale's voice can't reach his throat, as it seems, so he nods.

The boy, John, watches him for a second before continuing; "Ma talked our ears off about you. She says you're something special."

Gale can feel the heat rise up to his cheeks. “She really shouldn’t have.”

“Hm,” He looks him up and down for a moment before meeting his eyes. Gale remembers he’s still wearing his orphanage clothes and can’t help but to feel embarrassed. “Where are you from? You have a strong accent.”

“Wyoming.”

He raises an eyebrow. “That’s a deep voice ya got. How old are you again?”

It makes him feel conscious of it, so Gale has to clear his throat before answering; “Sixteen,” and because this is starting to feel like one of the thousand interviews he had in the orphanage, he adds; “and you?”

“Eighteen,” and before Gale can say anything, he continues, “I know, I know. I look older. Ms. Abraham, my teacher, used to tell me that all the time.”

He says it in such a smug way, that Gale has to wonder; “Should she be telling you this?”

“She’s actuall-”

“Boys!” a voice calls from downstairs, loud enough to shut John mid-sentence, “Can you come down? Dinner is served.”

“Shit,” John grumbles under his breath, voice distressed all of a sudden.

Gale hates intruding, but he can’t help but to ask; “Everything okay?”

“Nah, don’t worry. Just Ma is gonna give me shit about being all sweaty at the dinner ta-”

“Did I just hear you swear, John Clarence Egan?” Linda calls from downstairs again, louder this time.

Gale watches as John’s eyes go wide and he runs a distressed hand through his face, now whispering a small *‘Fuck’* before looking back at Gale, “Go on down. I’ll be there in a sec.”

Gale just nods, not questioning their dynamic because *it’s really not his place.* It's a miracle enough that he was adopted at the ripe age of sixteen, he’s not about to risk it all by getting up into the Egans’ personal business.

He doesn’t bother changing his clothes as he makes his way to the living room, not wanting to be late to dinner just because he feels silly in his orphanage clothes – he can always change later, afterall.

Linda, Melissa and John Sr. are all at the kitchen table already when he joins, a dinner that is more like *feast* served atop it – which does nothing to lower Gale’s notion of the Egans being practically royalty.

Melissa pulls the chair beside her back for him to sit, preventing him from looking like a dumbass standing awkwardly at the end of the table, and he can’t help but to be grateful for it.

Still, when he looks toward Linda and John Sr., he adds; “May I sit?”

“Of course Gale, silly!” Linda says, the biggest smile plastered onto her face.

“That’s the first time anyone has ever asked that in this household, young man. You’ve got good manners,” John Sr. adds, and Gale can feel the heat rise up to his cheeks.

“Thank you,” Gale says back, because really, what else is there to say? He’s barely accustomed to being acknowledged, much less *complimented* by an authoritative figure.

He can’t help but to wonder if his whole life, had living like this ever been a possibility before? Are people just *born* this lucky? Is he just… *unfortunate?*

“So Gale, I hope you like smashed potatoes, ‘cause they are my specialty! I’ve also made some steak and salad, of course. We need our kids strong in this household. Speaking of which, where is John?”

“Jerking off in the bathroom, I’m sure!” Melissa says, a laugh halfway out her mouth when Linda flicks her shoulder.

“Melissa, *language!* Dear lord, you're going to scare the poor boy talking like this,” Linda reprimands her, unaware that Gale was holding back a laugh himself.

Melissa has opened her mouth to apologize, Gale assumes, when she’s

interrupted by the younger John plopping down on the chair beside Gale's.

He's got a shirt now – *which is dreadful,* his mind supplies without his consent – and his hair is brushed back, giving him somewhat of an Elvis look.

"John-"

"I'm sorry, Ma. I was just changing," he supplies before she can scold him.

Linda gives him a long, evaluating look before turning her attention back to Gale with a smile back on her face, "As I was saying, I really hope you enjoy the food. We're really happy to have you here, sweetie."

"Thank you, Ma'am. I'm happy to be here," Gale says, sincere – because that's the thing really, he just can't comprehend how someone like *him* could get this lucky. How could he possibly *not* be happy?

They each serve their plates after that and, the minute the food is in his mouth, Gale can't recall the last time he had food *this* good.

So he says so; "Linda, you're a *great* cook!"

"Oh, stop! I try my best! You have to try John's pasta, though. It's marvelous!"

Gale can't help but to turn to face John beside him, genius curiosity in his tone when he asks; "You cook?"

"I do," John Sr. says, at the head of the table, and Gale must turn to look at him really surprised, because he adds, "What? Never met a father who can cook before?"

No, Gale wants to say. Instead, he says; "I can't wait to try it, Sir!"

He barely gets to eat a few forkfuls before John Sr. addresses him again, "So Gale, do you play any sports? I have a baseball team, I don't know if you remember."

Gale can just faintly recall John Sr. mentioning his team at the adoption interviews, though most of the details have blacked out from his mind. The thing is: he's had so many interviews with so many families, his mind has learned to forget them as soon as they're over. He never knew any of it could be useful again.

It certainly would be handy to remember more of it *now.*

"I remember, sir. John is a part of it, yes?"

"My best player, when he doesn't have his head up his ass," John Sr. nudges his son, a smile on his face, and the younger John groans by Gale's side.

The table turns to soft laughter, silverware clicking on plates as the younger John goes on a rampage to explain, in excruciating detail, how today wasn't his lucky day and how it was everyone's fault but his.

Gale hasn't felt this at ease in his whole entire life.

Later, after he's helped Linda clean off the table, had a shower and finally changed out of his orphanage clothes, he gets back to his room with a feeling of tranquility he just can't shake – and really, really doesn't *want to*.

John is already sitting on his bed, the one just to the right of Gale's, when he walks in. Gale ignores his stare in favor of sorting through the things in his bag, still unsure whether to unpack in case all of this turns temporary.

"No one calls me John, you know," John calls from behind him, his stare boring a hole into the back of Gale's skull.

So Gale turns to face him, "Yeah? And what do they call you?"

"Bucky," he says, cocky smile in the corners of his lips as the name rolls off his tongue.

"And why is that?" Gale says, sitting down on his bed, still looking at him.

John's smile is still on as he says; "Dunno. Made it up when I was a kid and it stuck around. Got tired of having the same name as my dad."

"Why don't you go by *Clarence* then?" Gale says, halfway through a teasing tone as he remembers the name Linda had called him earlier.

A smile forms in his lips too.

"God, you need to ask?" He barks out a laugh, laying down on his own bed but not breaking his eye contact with Gale. "You have a middle name?"

"I do, but Gale is fine."

John sits up on his elbow, incredulous look on his face, "Well now, c'mon, you can't *not* tell me. It's unfair!"

Gale can't help but to laugh at his whiny tone, "Aight, fine. It's Winston."

"Wow, and you have the audacity to laugh at *Clarence!* That's bold of you, *Winston!"* John laughs too, a full belly laugh that is nothing if not contagious.

So Gale joins him. "C'mon, John. I said Gale is fine."

"I'll call you Gale when you call me Bucky, Mr. Winston," John smiles, teasing.

"You got yourself a deal, Bucky," Gale smiles back. In the back of his mind, he tries not to think about how comfortable he's getting, how all of it has been so easy and could be taken back as fast as a signature on the bottom of a document.

It wouldn't be the first time.

So he doesn't think of it. Doesn't think of his old house or the orphanage or anything in between. In fact, doesn't think of anything at all as his head hits the pillow and he drifts to sleep.

He only hears his father's voice once in his dream, tone drowned out by a river of naked full chests that may or may not resemble the one from earlier in the day.

By the time he wakes, Bucky isn't there anymore. Only Linda is still at the house, and she takes the day to give him a proper tour of the property and get him properly informed about the school he'll be starting monday.

He tries to tell her he's used to this by now – moving schools, new classmates – but she tells him all about it anyway.

From what she says, it sounds like a relatively small high school, but that doesn't bother Gale too much – he's only got about two more years of it anyway.

Melissa is then the first to get home – from her job in retail, she tells him. She immediately snatches him from Linda's grasp to offer yet another Egan rant about anything their town has to offer.

A full blown theater. A skating rink. Two parks and even a little shopping mall.

Gale doesn't tell her that Casper had all of those too – he doesn't like to think of Casper too much.

By the time John Sr. and Bucky get home, both women have informed him on just about everything Gale can think of; the name of the neighbors, who to befriend, who to avoid, what time everything opens and closes, and even where to get weed – last one courtesy of Melissa, of course.

Gale is laying down in the backyard when Bucky eventually sits by his side.

“Lisa told me she ratted off my contact to you. Fair warning; he’s always raising his prices, let me tell ya. He is very much a con man,” Bucky says as soon as he’s on the ground beside him, laying his back on the grass as well.

Gale can’t help but to laugh, “It’s fine, I don’t smoke anyway.”

Bucky turns so rapidly to face him, Gale almost gets startled. “WHAT?” He clears his throat, laughing, “Sorry, *what?* Why not? It’s one of the best things good ol’ Manitowoc has to offer!”

“It’s just… not my thing I guess.” Gale says, failing to say that his dad smoked so much, he’s probably got more nicotine in his lungs than the entirety of Manitowoc combined just from being around him growing up.

“Well, then what is?” Bucky says, and when Gale looks at him confused, he adds; “Your *thing.”*

“Oh, I dunno,” Gale shrugs, looking back to the sky so he doesn’t have to stare at Bucky with him so close. He hadn’t even realized John had sat literally *right beside him.*

“C’mon, there must be *something* that gets your gears grindin’” He nudges him playfully, eyes boring a hole into Gale’s profile.

“I’m pretty clean through and through, if I’m honest with ya,” Gale says, unrelenting. And, really, not even *lying* at that.

“Aight, so no drugs. What’s your poison then? Alcohol?”

Sex, is the first thing Gale thinks. Not much else is available when you live in an orphanage for so long, and because of it he’s had his plenty share of it – the revolving selections of boys he’s shared a dorm with no strangers to his body. But that’s not something you tell your *adoptive brother,* even when they look as hot as Bucky does.

So instead, he says; “Nah, no alcohol for me either.” And that’s true as well.

Bucky stares at him some more before he finally turns to stare at the sky too – and Gale doesn’t even realize until he lets out a breath that he had been holding it this entire time.

They stay in silence for all of three seconds before Bucky adds; “That’s why Ma likes you so much, then. She’s always dreamed of having a *good boy.”*

The shrill that runs down Gale’s spine is almost perceptible, and he has to sit up so he has a reason not to look at Bucky when he says; “You’re a troublemaker, then?”

“Through and through, Mr. Winston,” the smile can be heard through his voice as he says it, and Gale can’t avoid the eye roll he does.

“It's Gale,” he deadpans.

John sits up beside him to nudge his side, their arms touching from shoulder to elbow, “I know, I’m just messing with ya, Buck.”

“ *Buck?”* Gale says, looking back at him with raised eyebrows.

They really are sitting so, *so* close.

“As your now older brother, it’s my duty to nickname you, ain’t it?” John says back, cheeky smile printed onto his face.

They’re still touching shoulder to elbow. Their legs are inches apart on the grass.

“So you’re gonna nickname me after yourself?” Gale says, and he can’t properly breathe, it seems, because his voice comes out lower than he intended to.

“Never said I ain’t got an ego, Buck,” John gives him another flashy smile before pushing himself up, looking down at him to add; “or do you prefer Winston?”

Without Bucky standing so close, Gale manages to properly catch his breath again. His voice comes out his normal tone when he says; “Can’t you just call me Gale?”

“Hmmmm,” he looks around, feigning like he is properly pondering whether to call him Gale or not, then barking out a laugh; “nah, don’t think so. Gonna help Ma out with dinner before she comes barking at me. See ya inside!”

And then he’s stepping in through the back door, leaving Gale alone to his thoughts.

He has to consciously remind himself that Bucky isn’t just another one of his orphanage roommates that would come and go and he would never have to see again. Has to remind himself that he really, *really* can’t mess this up.

He joins John in helping out for dinner no longer than five minutes later.

He doesn't think about him shirtless once before he eventually falls asleep.

He dreams of the same naked chest.

Melissa is the one to wake him next day, dragging him out of bed before his sheets have even properly left his body. She urges him to change fast, so he does.

Ten minutes later, Melissa is driving him somewhere in John Sr.’s truck.

She tunes the radio into a station only to lower the volume down almost completely to favor talking to him instead.

During the forty minute drive, she tells him all about Tammy – who Gale knows to be the older sister – and her husband. Where they live, how they met, how long they've been together, how relentless Tammy was about keeping her last name – making her Tammy Egan Smith, according to Melissa.

She speaks highly of her sister the entire time, only to immediately call her a bitch the moment she opens the door.

It goes as such:

Melissa parks the truck completely sideways in the driveway.

Melissa rings the doorbell.

Melissa rings the doorbell *again* five seconds later.

Melissa is about to ring the doorbell a *third time* not even three seconds later when Tammy opens the door.

And then, Melissa immediately barks out a; “You bitch!” before jumping into her sister's arms with the biggest smile he's seen on her.

“Hello to you too, Lisa!” Tammy laughs, holding her sister up by her back. When she spots Gale from behind Melissa's shoulder, the biggest grin immediately snaps her face in half. “Oh my god, is this Gale?”

“I brought him to see you!” Melissa says, voice strangled because she's still being squished by her sister.

Tammy eventually lets her go in favor of walking towards Gale and hugging *him* instead.

He doesn’t expect it, so he's standing there awkward for the better part of it until he eventually remembers that he should hug her back – just in time for her to let go.

It makes Gale blush a little, feeling awkward, but Tammy makes no note of it as she grabs him by the wrist and pulls him inside the house.

“Please, Gale, you need to tell me everything! I wanna know all about you! The orphanage wouldn't let us visit, you know, but I *really* wanted to!” She says, working herself up with her own excitement as she motions for Gale to sit down at her table, sitting in front of him.

Melissa soon joins, sitting by her side; “Yeah, I told him. So unfair, right?”

“I promise I'm not that interestin-” Gale begins, but can't finish his sentence before Melissa is cutting him off;

“Nonsense! He's been at the house two days and everyone is already in love, I swear! Even dad won't shut up about him!”

“See? You're downplaying your impact, mister! Now go on, tell me all about you!” Tammy says, all the authority of an older sister – even when she’s only twenty-three, if he remembers correctly from his

interviews.

“Well, what is there to say?” Gale scratches the back of his neck awkwardly, trying to come up with the parts of his life that don't involve trying to get a family or being thrown out of his own. “I, uhm, I used to be on the track team?!”

“You do track?” Tammy beams the biggest smile. “Oh my, so did I! What else? What are your hobbies? What do you like to listen to?”

“I- Well, I like the sky and stuff. I dreamt of being a pilot when I was a kid,” he says, and it's a half truth – because he *did* dream of it, but half of it was only because being a pilot would mean he’d be able to fly *away*. “And music… I don’t know. There weren't many records back in the orphanage, so I didn't really have that much music growing up. But I guess there was this one Elvis album there that I was obsessed with.”

“Oh, Elvis is sooo good looking, isn't he?” Melissa says, a dreamy look on her face as she looks halfway through starting to wax poetic about the singer’s features.

“Shut up, Lisa. Gale wouldn't know about that,” Tammy scolds, nudging her sister.

And, well. Gale *would.* Gale, in fact, *does.*

Being gay is not exactly the greatest thing to be in the 50's, but he *is.* Plus, it's not like there's few gays out in the wild – he’s been with enough boys in the orphanage to prove all the statistics flowing around wrong.

And it's not like he’s living his life in shame either; he didn't go on a rampage to find himself a whole new family just to live in secret again.

So, he says so; “Nah, I agree. He's pretty hot.”

Tammy and Lisa exchange a single look before Melissa bursts out laughing, chair tipping back as she laughs toward the ceiling. Tammy is giving her the best death stare he's seen when her sister eventually calms down.

Before Tammy can scold her again, because that's what it looks like she's about to do, Lisa says; “Well, so there it goes setting you up with my coworker,” She’s still giggling as she says it, and Tammy has to nudge her pretty hard for her to smack the smile off her face, her tone turning more serious. “I mean, I can still do it if you want to, Gale. Of course!”

Gale is the one to laugh now, watching the scene unfold in front of him as hilarious as one of the sitcoms that passes on the telly.

When he calms down, both sisters are staring at him almost expectantly, so he says: “He a man? Otherwise I'm fine.”

Tammy is the last to join the laughter that ensues after.

Never in his life has Gale dreamt that coming out would be this easy – at least not until he did so, back in one of his earlier interviews with the Egans. That’s the one interview he can never forget; he was halfway into a panic attack back then, stumbling to get the words out, yet Linda had opened a smile almost immediately and John Sr. had just tipped his head in acknowledgement.

Then, they proceed with the adoption anyway.

It's nice not to have the secret to carry anymore.

It's even *nicer* to have sisters to talk about hot guys with.

Sisters . As Tammy serves them coffee and they go through the entirety of Elvis' discography, he guesses that that's what they could be, what they *are*.

Sisters.

Tammy insists they come back soon when they eventually have to leave. Insists that she will visit soon as well.

And on the way back, Melissa actually turns the radio all the way up so they can belt out to the songs Gale knows.

He smiles all the way home.

Bucky is on the front porch when they arrive, nursing a cigarette. Gale can't spot what brand it is even after they get out of the car, but from the smell he can tell it's not the same his father used to smoke – probably still does, in fact, if he hasn't been killed off by someone already.

“Mind telling me where you kidnapped Buck to?” Bucky says around a

mouthful of smoke.

Melissa snatches the cigarette from his fingers only to pluck it into her mouth, and after a drag she says; “Took him to see Tammy. She loves him.”

“Of course she does,” John says, plucking the cigarette back from her fingers, “how could she not love Buck?”

“Why're you calling him Buck?” Melissa says, rolling her eyes as she sits beside him on the porch.

“Don't he look like a Buck to you?” Bucky says, the cigarette held between his teeth as a grin forms in the corners of his mouth.

“God, you're so egotistical to name him after yourself. I'm older, I should be the one to get nickname rights. What if I wanted to name him, I don't know, Mel-o?”

“ *Mel-o?* What kind of Jell-o brand name is *that?”* John barks out a laugh, holding the cigarette out of her reach when she moves to snatch it again.

“You guys do realize I'm right here, right?” Gale deadpans, staring at them from where he's standing right in front of their line of sight.

John completely ignores him, “Plus, it's first come first serve” he takes a last drag of the cigarette, winking to Gale as he hands the cigarette to his sister and pushes himself up to stand beside him, “Now, don't mind me, but *I'll* be the one kidnapping *Buck* for the night.”

“Where're you even taking him?” Melissa says, confused look on her face as she moves the cigarette to her lips.

“Yeah, where are you taking *me?* Which, again, *I'm right here.”* Gale says, turning on his side to face Bucky.

“Me and my friends are going out. You're joining us.” John beams, biggest grin on his face as a horn beeps loudly behind them, “and there is our cue. See you later sis, tell Ma I'll bring Gale back in one piece when we get home. Pinky promise.”

“Yeah, sure John. Don't let your freak friends mess him up too bad,” she says with yet another effortless roll of her eyes.

Before Gale can even begin to protest, the horn is beeping again and John is dragging him by his arm towards the car. He barely has time to wave Melissa goodbye before he's being shoved in the backseat of the Jeep, John joining on his other side.

“Hey boys,” John says loudly to the two boys upfront, “this here is Gale, the one I told you about. Let's show him a good night.”

The car speeds off the driveway as soon as the chatter starts to bloom rapidly around the music that is blasting from the speakers.

John's friends – Curt and James, he learns – are as much of a blabber mouth as seemingly every person Gale’s met since moving into the Egan household.

They take Gale to a dingy bar not ten minutes away from the house – sticky floors, low light, doesn't card at the entrance, the whole ordeal.

And not even an hour later, they're all plastered and Gale is already nursing his third Coke of the night. They haven't stopped talking the whole time – even with the loud music blasting all around them.

Gale, regretfully, has to admit he's having a good time even through dealing with Bucky's chaotic friend group while being dead sober.

James eventually parts from the group to ask a girl to dance, all the charm of a recently turned twenty year old who's just figured out how to properly grow out his mustache.

Gale, meanwhile, had been eyeing the club to see if there were any suitors for himself – but it being a bar in the middle of nowhere Wisconsin, it's not that easy to find someone for a back alley blowie. Especially when he's sixteen – and *looks it.*

It's still his best shot, though, in lieu of just staring at Bucky's body sweat-covered by his side, unevenly belting out a song that he doesn't even seem to know.

"So," Curt, John's other friend who's short with a stocky build, carries a deep New Yorker accent and a laugh to match it, screams in his ear; "Find anyone yet?"

"Nah, no one my type," Gale says back, quick enough that it looks like he's avoiding the question – which he didn't mean to.

"No way, man. That pretty lady has been staring at you ever since we

walked in," Curt points to her with her chin, as discreet as a horse in the middle of a ballroom.

Gale looks back to her to at least pretend interest, turning back to Curt after what he assumes is considered enough time for consideration, "She's a bit too old for me, man. Sorry."

"Too old?" Curt's eyebrow shoots up, looking him up and down, "How old are yer?"

"Sixteen," John supplies for him, seemingly having been listening to their conversation the entire time. "And Buck's right, she's too old for him," he supplies, tone sounding a bit off even to Gale's ears, who doesn't even know him all that well yet.

"Aight, jeez. I'm not gonna try to play wingman for yer young bro anymore, relax," Curt's hands shoot up, busted smile crossing his face.

Gale barks out a laugh almost involuntarily, and Curt and John are easy to join him.

Later in the night Curt wanders off to dance with a girl himself, James still glued to the lady he found almost as soon as they walked in.

Bucky, however, stays with him the whole night – which is great, by all means, but also means Gale has to deal with John's sweaty drunk self while not even looking for a quickie to avoid working himself up too much.

That's supposed to be his brother, for god's sake.

It's not until it's one a.m. that the three of them – not four, because James seems to have hit it off particularly well with his date for the night – are stumbling out the bar, Curt and John both holding themselves up and pushing themselves down by carrying each other's body weight.

Gale laughs, because laughter seems easy to come by since he's been with the Egans.

Except, when they reach the car, Curt tosses him the keys in an overly nonchalant manner as he plops himself right into his *own* back seat.

Gale is left standing beside the vehicle with a huge crease between his brows. "What does he expect me to do with this?" He asks John, who's holding himself up by leaning his side against the car.

"What d'ya think, genius?" John laughs, loud and open as he always seems to do. Then, he answers; "Drive, Gale. He wants you to *drive."*

"But- *What?* John, I've never driven a car before!" Gale says, desperation seeping into his tone.

John's face turns serious almost immediately, blinking forcefully to, presumably, focus his eyes; "What, you serious? Not even a little?"

Gale widens his eyes; "Yeah, John. *Not even a little."*

"God, okay. It's okay. So, hear me out, I'm too drunk to drive, but I'll help you, aight? I'll be there the whole time," John says, hands laid

out in front of him like he's both trying to calm down a feral dog *and* find his balance at once. He still stumbles back, having to catch himself on his feet.

“John, didn't you hear me? *I don't know how to!”* Gale says, now full on desperate. “Can’t we just call your friend James?”

“My man hasn't got laid in ages, he'll kill us!” John says matter-of-factly. Gale feels his heartbeat quicken. “Hey, look at me. It's fine, Curt's car is an automatic, all you have to do is shift into drive and push down the accelerator, you'll do great. *Trust me.”*

And for some odd, unexplainable reason, Gale *does.*

He notices he's shaking a bit as he makes his way into the driver's side. Curt seems to be fully passed out on the back when he eventually gets the balls to sit at the driver's seat.

John is at his side, on the passenger's, looking at him like Gale’s about to break any second – which might not be far off.

When Gale closes the door and snaps his seatbelt in, and nothing seems to happen, he turns to John with an almost-frantic tone; “What do I do now?”

“Hey, calm down. You're fine. First, put the key in the ignition and turn clockwise. You got it,” John says, speaking like a drunk who’s trying to sound coherent – which is exactly what he is.

Gale does so. When the car makes noise, he turns to John again; “What now?”

“So, there's two pedals at your feet. Left is the brakes, right is the accelerator. You're only going to use your right foot to drive, okay? Leave the left one to the side,” John instrucs, and Gale can see him forcibly blinking his eyes open from his peripheral vision. He nods an acknowledgment, so John continues; “Alright, now put your right foot on the brakes. You did it?” John continues, sounding ever so careful, and Gale nods again when he does as he’s told. “That’s it, good boy. Now, you're going to put your hand on the gear, and you're going to push the button and move the gear into D.”

Gale can’t even process the *‘good boy’* part as he continues to do as he’s told – or, whether, *tries to,* because he can’t find the button and the car is dark and he doesn't even know which direction he has to move the gear to and Curt is snoring in the back seat and John is staring at him and he's supposed to be his brother but *fuck he's so hot.*

John must notice, even in his drunk state, that Gale is a breath away from hyperventilating, so he says; “Gale, *you're fine.* Don't worry. It's a quick drive, you're not going to mess up. Now here,” he places his hand on top of Gale’s, and the tingle that runs from the tip of his fingers to the back of his spine makes him physically shake.

He can only hope John is too drunk to notice.

He must be, because he keeps his hand on top of Gale’s as he moves both their thumbs to press on the side of the gear, pulling it back into the Drive button and clicking it into place. John keeps his hand there a second longer before removing it to lay atop his own lap.

“Now, hands on the wheel,” John continues, and Gale has to forcibly snap himself off the haze he’s got himself in, both his hands moving to hold the sides of the steering wheel. “Good, like that. Now, let go of the brakes and, with your right foot, *slowly* push the accelerator.”

The first try is disastrous, the car accelerating too rapidly and Gale instinctively moving his feet to the brakes again, making the car halt and jostling Curt in the back seat.

“John, I can't do this,” Gale turns to him exasperated, hands holding the wheel so tight his knuckles are turning white.

“Yes you can, Gale. You've got this in the bag, *trust me,”* John says, suddenly more awake, body turned to face Gale fully. “Try again, slowly. It's easy peasy, I promise. You do trust me, right?”

And Gale must be clinically deranged, because again, *he does.* So slowly, and *very* slowly this time, he moves his right foot from the brakes to the accelerator, the car slowly but surely starting to move again.

Gale can see John's grin as Gale slowly moves them from the parking lot to the paved street, car driving at barely 10 miles per hour as he starts making his way down the lane the way they came, managing miraculously to slow down without a halt when they approach a red light.

“See, you're a natural! You already drive better than Lisa!” John says, all smiles on Gale’s peripheral.

“As if that's much of a compliment,” he says, eyes focused on the road as the light turns green and he starts driving forward again.

John barks a laugh so genuine, it even makes Gale a bit less tense. This time around, he even manages to get the car to an astounding 25 miles per hour.

And every time he checks if John's fallen asleep beside him, his eyes are still steady on Gale.

He gets them home.

John has to drag Curt from the backseat and bring him inside the house, carrying him upstairs as Gale trails behind him to find Linda drinking coffee right by the entrance.

Gale stops right in his tracks, eyes glued to the ground, "Hi, Ma'am. I'm so sorry for coming back at this hour, I promise that it'll never hap-"

She pushes his head up by the chin, looking right to his eyes, "Gale, don't be silly. Did you have fun? The boys didn't get you in any trouble, did they?"

"Oh- I- Yeah, I had fun. Aren't you mad?" Gale says, stumbling over his words, struggling to hold her eye contact.

"Of course not! I'm glad you're having fun, sweetie. John, however, needs to stop dragging his friends inside the house. That boy Curt always walks around like he owns the place," Linda says, but her tone is so light it seems like even *that* barely bothers her either.

It seems Gale has truly fucking *lucked out.* Not only are the Egans a family that accepts him, but they also want him to be happy - or, even yet, want him *around.*

Meanwhile, Gale had spent the entire night thinking about how he'd like it if their youngest son had railed him in a back alley.

God, he's rotten.

He can't fuck this up – good things like this don't happen frequently, not to people *like him.*

He needs to make it work. *He's going to make this work.*

He must've stayed quiet for too long, locked inside his own head, because Linda adds; "You should go to sleep, sweetie. I'll see you in the morning, go rest."

Gale can only nod as he moves the tiny bit closer to her to give her a quick hug. He doesn't notice the smile that blooms in her face as he steps back and walks up to his room.

When he gets there, Curt and John are cramped on John's bed – both shirtless, messy and sound asleep.

That night, Gale falls asleep to the sound of Curt's snores.

He dreams of the day his parents disowned him, wakes up gasping half a dozen times during the night.

John and Curt are still passed out by the time he wakes and joins John Sr. at the kitchen table, quietly sharing a coffee with him.

It's something akin to five minutes later when John Sr. drops his newspaper on the table to look at him, pen in his right hand, “Do you by any chance know what's another word for lighthearted?”

“Carefree?” Gale says around his mug, steam blowing up his face.

“I was thinking the same, but it's only three letters,” he says, staring at the newspaper like it's about to jump up and bite him.

“I, uhm-” Gale has to clear his throat, turning to look anywhere but at him, “Maybe *gay?”*

“Oh!” John Sr. almost jumps up on his chair, quickly scribbling the letters onto his crossword. He turns to Gale after careful analysis of the page in front of him, “You're right!”

It's a few more minutes of silence before Gale is, even to his own surprise, the one to break it; “So, Sir… are you really okay with me being, you know, *lighthearted?* ”

John Sr. turns to look at him like the question was a personal offense to his character, and maybe it was; “C'mon boy, don’t insult me like that. Of course I am! You think Linda was the only one who wanted you in this family? We *all* do.”

Gale is usually better at controlling his emotions, considering the environments he has spent his whole life thus far, but a tear escapes the corner of his eye before he can help it.

John Sr. pretends not to notice as Gale wipes it away with the back of his hand.

“Thank you, Sir.” Gale says, voice a little raw.

John Sr. looks at him for a full ten seconds before the corners of his mouth tilt up, the Egan grin recognizable anywhere; “Call me John, son. Or call me dad, whenever you'd like.”

Gale has spent the better part of three months getting to know this man and Linda, more interviews and paperwork between the three of them than he can count on his fingers.

Still, he waits till it's appropriate to properly excuse himself to cry in the backyard.

He's never had a proper dad. *Not one that counted.*

He spends the next hours of early morning testing out in his head how it'd be to properly call anyone dad.

He doesn’t think of John’s likely shirtless body sleeping just beside his bed – or, *he tries not to.*

Curt is a mess when he eventually wakes up, walking around the place like he’s the King – like Linda said he would.

Bucky spends the better part of the day complaining about a headache and throwing ball with Curt in the backyard.

He calls Gale to join, more than once.

Gale declines.

He tells Curt about the nickname he's come up for Gale more excitedly than what's called for, but doesn't rat out Gale's middle name in his storytelling.

He doesn't mention how yesterday he kept calling Buck "Gale" either, when he drunkenly taught him how to drive.

Maybe he didn't notice. Maybe he *forgot*.

It's best if Gale does too.

Gale falls asleep at night with his back turned to John and mind forcibly blank.

He dreams about having a family.

Wakes up to one.

His first day in the new school is mostly uneventful. He's been changing schools ever since he was disowned at eleven and was moved from one orphanage to another, so hanging out around a new crowd is nothing new to him.

John's group mostly takes him under their wing – except they're all seniors and it's not until the end of the week that Gale actually starts making friends in his own grade.

By then the whole school already knows he's the "new Egan" – even though he hasn't changed his name in the adoption process. At least not yet. Curt teases him that he'll have to dye his hair brunette to match, and Gale teases him about sleeping in the back of his own car.

It takes him no time to learn why everyone likes John and his friends so much.

John Sr. corners him Thursday night to ask him if he has any interest in joining the baseball team. Gale tells him he's never played, but that he likes track – and John Sr. proceeds to sneak out of his own team's baseball practice to watch Gale's tryouts for the track team.

He gets in. John Sr. cooks the family his famous pasta to celebrate.

It's as delicious as everyone said it would be.

By Sunday, he starts to unpack his bag into the closet Linda had cleaned out for him. His clothes barely fill a fourth of it.

On the next Tuesday, Melissa takes him to her work and forces him to pick out at least a handful of clothes for himself, ringing him with her employee discount.

John sleeps shirtless every night and Gale still has to sleep with his back facing him so his mind doesn't wander.

By day twenty in the Egan household, Linda sits him down at the dinner table with all his documents so he, her, and later John Sr. can sign the last of his papers.

He goes to bed that night with a new pair of sleeping shorts and decides not to bother with a shirt for once.

John is dressed almost exactly the same not two feet to his right, lamp turned on on his desk and book lazily thrown open on his bed.

Gale can't fall asleep.

John doesn't start talking until after he's turned his lamp off, voice quiet in the dark of night; "Have you guys decided yet?"

He talks as if he's sure that Gale is awake, so it must be obvious. Gale doesn't even bother to pretend he was asleep, talking to the wall in front of him in the same hushed tone; "Decided on what?"

"What?" John asks, a little louder. "Can't hear ya, Buck."

Gale blinks his eyes a few times, eyesight already adjusted to the dark, before he gets the balls to shift on his bed and face John beside him. He keeps his tone low, " *I said,* decided on what?"

John is facing him as well. Gale can see all the parts of Bucky's body moving where he's laying on top of his sheets.

“On your last name. You keeping your current one?” John says, voice back to a hushed tone.

Gale has to breathe before answering. He looks John in his eyes, finds his pupils blown wide. “I dunno yet. It’s.. complicated.”

“What is it? Your last name, I mean,” John says, and the more Gale’s eyes adjust, the more he can see just how much John fills up his bed. He has the urge to face the wall again, but ignores it.

“Cleven,” he answers, and he could drop off at that – yet, for some reason, he has the urge to add; “It’s not that *I like it,* but I’m the only child of an only child father, so.. you know. Maybe it would be for the best, anyway.”

John seems to analyze him for a whole minute, almost unlinking eyes boring a hole into Gale’s face in the dark, before he adds; “What happened to your folks?”

No one asks him that question anymore – not since he was dropped off at an orphanage in the middle of god knows where with a backpack and a box of documents. The Egans haven’t asked either, and he hasn’t willingly provided the information.

For some reason unbeknownst to him, with John’s eyes staring into his own, Gale feels, for once, compelled to answer; “They’re fine, I think. As fine as *they* can be.”

John sits up on his elbows, a picture of what he did the day they first met, his naked chest illuminated by the moonlight streaming from the window between their beds.

Not even the dark can mask the surprise on his face. “What do you mean? I don’t get it. They’re in prison?”

It should be considered rude the way he phrases it, but it somehow doesn’t compute like that to Gale’s brain.

He doesn’t know, not really, why he keeps talking; “Not since I last heard, no.”

“Then why-” John says, seemingly stopping himself when he realizes how loud he’s gotten. His tone is a whisper again when he continues. *“Why are you not with them? I don’t understand.”*

John is still looking into his eyes, pupils even wider than before, and Gale can’t blink. *He doesn’t know why he keeps answering.* “To make a very long story short, they didn’t want me.”

Gale doesn’t know how it happens – one moment John is staring at him from across the room, the next he’s seated on the side of his bed.

Gale’s body is on top of the sheets. They’re both shirtless. John’s side is touching him.

He can’t breathe.

“You’re kidding, right?” He says, an almost laughable tone to his hushed voice. His next phrase comes out at least a dozen octaves lower, *“ How could anyone not want you?”*

Gale can't fucking *breathe.*

John is right beside him and he's saying bullshit like this and he's supposed to be his fucking *brother* , for the love of god.

Gale has to work around his rapid heartbeat to even remotely be able to form his next sentence, and even then, he stumbles; "It's, uhm. My parents- they- well, it's complicated. Me being gay didn't help and- god. You're sitting too close, *I can't think."*

It all comes out rushed and stumbling upon itself, and by the time he vomits the words out, John is hovering over him far closer than before and Gale can feel his own heartbeat where John's right arm has moved to lay on top of his chest.

For once, John doesn't say anything.

It happens suddenly – *too suddenly.* One moment John had his hand on top of his shoulder, the next his hand is moving from his armpit to his pecs, then down to on top of where his guts are knotted inside his belly, up to his neck, down to his sides.

John Egan is touching just to touch, silent. John Egan is touching him and he's shirtless and Gale signed adoption papers not three hours before downstairs with John's parents.

By monday the papers will be in a judge's hand. By wednesday Gale will no longer be a child of the state.

By friday maybe he will be an Egan *too.*

He hasn't decided – *can't* decide, with John touching him in the dark, hand roaming on his chest like it belongs there, like he could reach between Gale's ribs and snatch his heart right out.

"What are you doing?" Gale says, voice cracking like a teenager – because that's what he *is.* He is sixteen to John's eighteen, and John's touching him. He'll be John's brother by the end of next week.

John ignores his question altogether, hand moving down to the center of Gale's chest, where his muscle is defined and the fine hair is standing on its end. "Your heart is pounding," he says, in a whisper.

His hand takes up half of Gale's middle. Gale's dick is getting visibly hard inside his shorts.

"You're touching me," Gale says, as a means of explanation. His heart is beating so hard, he can feel the blood flowing through his veins. *He can't think.*

John leans down then, mouth a breath away from Gale's ear. If it wasn't for his legs hanging from the side of the bed, he'd be laying down beside Gale. His voice comes even lower than it's been this whole time, breath hitting the side of Gale's face; *"I just can't picture someone not wanting you."*

John's breath hits his face like a slap, and a chill runs through the entirety of Gale. It throws him completely off guard, placing him back in one of the multiple nasty bunks he's called home, half a dozen boys sleeping around him as shoves his hand down the pants of yet another brunette.

They all look the same in his mind, every time the same thing as it was before – silent, rushed, uncaring and needy. Gale almost never kissed them; there was no *time.* They did what they needed to and never touched more than they had to – never *touched just to touch,* like John is.

John, who's shirtless beside him, hand roaming every inch of Gale's chest and breath hitting his ear. John, whose parents are just down the hall – parents of which he'll share with Gale in less than a week.

"John, you don't know what you're doing," Gale says, breathless. He's hard in his shorts and John is the hottest thing he's ever seen and he's never wanted to fuck someone this much.

" *John* is down the hall, Buck," John says to his ear again, breath curling around his profile like smoke from a cigarette would – like his father's smoke *did* when he was screaming at Gale and blowing nicotine to his face.

No, *not his father.*

His father is down the hall.

His father is *John's father.*

John's his brother.

"Bucky," Gale says, more so whines, when he pushes John's chest away from him, making him sit again. His hand is still on top of Gale's chest when he adds; "Maybe we should sleep."

John looks from his eyes to the hand he has on top of Gale’s heart, then back up again, before he uses Gale’s chest to push himself to stand.

He hovers by the side of Gale’s bed for a solid ten seconds, eyes roaming the entirety of Gale's half-exposed body, before serving him a single grin and throwing himself backwards to his own bed.

The moon is shining from between the window covers.

The moment is gone.

Gale dreams of naked chests and hands.

Wakes up before anyone to take the coldest shower of his life.

It's not until hours later that Bucky joins the rest of the family in the living room.

Everything is the same it has been for the past days – *except it isn't.*

They don't talk about it.

Linda drives Gale to the small courthouse Monday morning before school.

On Friday, a yellow envelope is delivered to the Egan household. Gale's new birth certificate is the first of the documents inside.

The first line reads: *Gale Wiston Egan* .

End Notes

hello again! so this fic was originally going to be 3k words of mostly smut with very little plot, but it has snowballed into something *much* bigger...
so, of course, this was 9k words of basically setting up this universe. i've already started on part 2, and that one will pick up even more on its intensity, let me tell ya.
if you're intersted in keeping up with universe at all, i suggest you follow the series this story is linked to, because it's there that i will update the next parts that will follow!

i also want to say i couldn't have written this without my dear friend and beta mysweetcreature. please go check out her stories as well, she's an espetacular writer! (also, check out out our collaborative story Arcadia, a clegan zombie apocalypse au, if that suits your fancy!)

i hope you enjoyed this story, and thank you so much for reading! please tell me your thoughts if you feel like it :)

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!